

## Gone Fishin'



“We just need to take a break”, said my friend on the phone. A break from 6 people and 2 dogs living in a motel room, while the long process of rebuilding their home ruined by the July 2nd storm unfolds. Who can blame her? I would need a break from all that, too. I told her that of course our little lake place is open for them. The dogs can run in the yard, the kids can play in the water, and everyone can just unwind for a while.

The other day I felt the need to take a little break and let go of some of life’s troubles. On a warm summer evening, a good place to do that is on the water. So we loaded up the canoe and the rods, and headed to a lake not far from our home. With over 400 fishable lakes, the Chippewa National Forest is full of places you might choose for such a venture. My favorite of them all is one I think of as “Tommy’s Lake”. A sweet little lake nestled in the pines, it has one of the prettiest shorelines to be found.

At this lake, I like to sit in the front of the canoe and leave the paddling to my husband. It’s not that I’m particularly lazy. I love paddling a canoe. It’s just that this way I am more free to toss out a hula-popper and wait for the bass to rise. More than any other kind of fishing, I enjoy bass fishing. I like aiming for a good place between the lily pads, and watching the fish hit the lure. They put up a nice little fight during the retrieve, and I love it when they jump. We eat enough fish, I don’t even care about taking any bass home. I just like to be there.

There’s more to Tommy’s Lake than just playing with the bass that I enjoy. It’s not a very big lake; just big enough for a pair of loons. We see them every time we go. The lake also sports an eagle nest. Some years the eagles use the nest near the drop-in boat landing; other years they use one of the alternate nests in their territory. Most eagles have at least a couple of nests in their breeding territory.

Tommy’s Lake is extra special because it also supports a black tern colony. This fascinating little tern nests semi-colonially, in clusters of 11 – 50 nests. The nests at Tommy’s Lake are hidden amidst the wild rice and lily pads. The emergent vegetation hides them well, but it is the behavior of the terns themselves that can give away the location of the colony. Their coarse,

squeaky calls intensify the closer you get to their nests, and they will not only dive bomb you, but have been known to strike humans from behind. This mobbing behavior is used on potential predators, and their mobbing is most intense when their chicks are in the nest.

Black terns lay 3 eggs, which hatch in about 20 days. Although it may be 20 more days before the chicks can fly, at the age of 6 hours they are capable of swimming away from the nest. Their eggshells are adapted to damp conditions. Terns eat fish and insects. It is fun to watch their darting, zigzag flight as they chase dragonflies.

The final reason Tommy's Lake is my favorite is because of Tommy. Although I never met Tommy, I feel like I know him just a little bit. Tommy's picture is tied to the base of a big red pine by the boat landing. Fishing lures, flowers, and toys adorn the spot. A marker explains that Tommy was "A little boy who lived to fish this lake and whose spirit lives on in all who see beauty in the early morning mist, who feel the excitement of nature awakening, and who share the simple joys of this world with a smile." It's dated 1994.

Someone who loves Tommy keeps this memorial going, at this special place. I can understand that. Every time I come here, the peace within me is restored. I hope it is that way for Tommy's people, too.

Despite the July 2nd windstorm that caused widespread damage on the Chippewa National Forest, there remain many, many beautiful spots like Tommy's Lake. Take some time to visit one, and unwind a little bit. It will do you a world of good.

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